



Billing Code: 3510-22-P

DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

RIN 0648-XD855

Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council (MAFMC); Fisheries of the Northeastern United States; Scoping Process

AGENCY: National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), Commerce.

ACTION: Notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement (EIS); notice of initiation of scoping process; notice of public scoping meetings; request for comments.

SUMMARY: The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council announces its intent to prepare, in cooperation with NMFS, an amendment to the Fishery Management Plan for Atlantic Mackerel, Squid, and Butterfish, and to potentially prepare an EIS in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act to analyze the impacts of any proposed management measures. The current focus of the amendment is to consider alternatives to reduce the capacities of the longfin squid and *Illex* squid fleets as defined by vessels with limited access permits. This notice announces a public process for determining the scope of issues to be addressed, for identifying concerns and potential alternatives related to capacity in the squid fisheries, and for determining the appropriate level of environmental analysis. This notice alerts the interested public of the scoping process, the potential development of a Draft EIS, and

provides for public participation in that process. The Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council will hold six scoping hearings in April 2015 for this amendment. At the scoping hearings the Council will also take any general comments on mackerel, squid, and butterfish fisheries management, which could inform future Council actions not including this amendment.

DATES: The meetings will be held over several weeks between April 6, 2015 and April 21, 2015. Written comments must be received on or before 11:59 p.m., EST, on [*INSERT DATE 45 DAYS FROM DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER*].

ADDRESSES: There will be six scoping meetings listed under the heading Dates, Times, and Locations.

Council address: Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 800 N. State St., Suite 201, Dover, DE 19901; telephone: (302) 674-2331.

Comment addresses: Written comments may be sent by any of the following methods:

- E-mail to the following *address: jdidden@mafmc.org*; Include "Squid Amendment Scoping Comments" in the subject line (recommended);
- Mail or hand deliver to Dr. Christopher M. Moore, Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council, 800 North State Street, Suite 201, Dover, Delaware 19901. Mark the outside of the envelope "Squid Amendment Scoping Comments"; or
- Fax to (302) 674-5399.
- Comments may also be provided verbally at any of the public scoping meetings.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Christopher M. Moore, Ph.D. Executive Director, Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council; telephone: (302) 526-5255. The Council's website, www.mafmc.org also has details on the meeting locations, webinar access, and background materials. Please contact Jason Didden by April 19, 2015 at

jdidden@mafmc.org or (302) 526-5254 if you would like to confirm that your computer is set up to access the webinar.

A scoping document will be posted to the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council website.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION:

Dates, Times and Locations

1. Monday April 6, 2015, 4 p.m. Superior Trawl, 55 State Street, Narragansett, RI 02882.
Telephone: (401) 782-1171.
2. Tuesday April 7, 2015, 5 p.m. Montauk Library, 871 Montauk Highway, Montauk, NY 11954. Telephone: (631) 668-3377.
3. Wednesday April 8, 2015, 5 p.m. Fairfield Inn, 185 MacArthur Dr, New Bedford, MA 02740. Telephone: (774) 634-2000.
4. Monday April 13, 2015, 6 p.m. Congress Hall Hotel. 251 Beach Ave, Cape May, NJ 08204. Telephone: (888) 944-1816.
5. Wednesday April 15, 2015, 5 p.m. Ocean Place Resort. 1 Ocean Blvd Long Branch, NJ, 07740. Telephone: 732-571-4000.
6. Tuesday April 21, 2015, 6 p.m. This April 21, 2015 meeting will be conducted via webinar accessible via the internet from the Council's website, www.mafmc.org. The Virginia Marine Resources Commission will also provide in-person access to the webinar at its office at: 2600 Washington Avenue, 4th Floor, Newport News, VA 23607; (757) 247-2200. Members of the public may also attend in-person at the Council office address (see below) for this webinar meeting, if they contact the Council by April 19, 2015.

Background

In the Mid-Atlantic Fishery Management Council's (Council) 2015 Implementation Plan (available at <http://www.mafmc.org/strategic-plan/>), the Council decided to initiate an action on a "Squid Capacity Amendment." There is considerable latent capacity in both the longfin squid and *Illex* squid fisheries; a small portion of vessels with limited access squid permits account for most landings in most years. The Council is concerned that activation of this latent capacity could cause problems in the fishery such as racing to fish and increased incidental catch of non-target species. Accordingly, the Amendment is likely to consider a variety of approaches for reducing capacity in the squid fisheries. Such approaches could include, but would not be limited to: A requalification of limited access permits; a tiered limited access system; and/or a limited access privilege program (LAPP), which is more commonly referred to as an "individual quota" or "catch share system." The Council has recently updated control dates for both squid fisheries – May 16, 2013 for longfin squid:

(<http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/nr/2013/May/13smblongfinbutterfishcontroldatephl.pdf>) and August 2, 2013 for *Illex* squid:

(<http://www.greateratlantic.fisheries.noaa.gov/nr/2013/August/13smbillexcontroldatephl.pdf>).

The Council may (or may not) use the current or previous control dates as reference points as it considers whether, and/or how, to further limit the number of participants in the squid fisheries (see preceding links for additional details on the control dates). The Council will first gather information during the scoping period. This is the first and best opportunity for members of the public to raise concerns related to the scope of issues that will be considered in the Amendment. The Council needs your input both to identify management issues and develop effective alternatives. Your comments early in the amendment development process will help us

address issues of public concern in a thorough and appropriate manner. Comment topics could include the scope of issues in the amendment, concerns and potential alternatives related to capacity in the squid fisheries, and the appropriate level of environmental analysis. Comments can be made during the scoping hearings as detailed above or in writing. If the Council decides to move forward with the Amendment, the Council will develop a range of management alternatives to be considered and prepare a draft EIS and/or other appropriate environmental analyses. These analyses will consider the impacts of the management alternatives being considered, as required by the National Environmental Policy Act. Following a review of any comments on the draft analyses, the Council will then choose preferred management measures for submission with a Final EIS or Environmental Assessment to the Secretary of Commerce for publishing of a proposed and then final rule, both of which have additional comment periods.

While the Council is conducting these scoping hearings, the Council will also accept general comments on the MSB fisheries. These general comments could inform Council decision making for upcoming annual specifications or other actions.

Special Accommodations

These meetings are physically accessible to people with disabilities. Requests for sign language interpretation or other auxiliary aid should be directed to M. Jan Saunders, (302) 526-5251, at least 5 days prior to the meeting date.

Authority: 16 U.S.C. 1801 *et seq.*

Dated: March 23, 2015.

Emily H. Menashes,

Acting Director,
Office of Sustainable Fisheries,
National Marine Fisheries Service.

[FR Doc. 2015-06944 Filed: 3/25/2015 08:45 am; Publication Date: 3/26/2015]